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DEPARTMENT OF STATE

Memorandum of Conversation

DATE: Oct. 24, 1952

SUBJECT: Ambassador Naim's Statement of Situation in View of the Soviet Demarche Concerning Afghan Oil Drilling Plans

PARTICIPANTS: Mr. Bruce, Under Secretary
H.R.H. Sardar Mohammad Naim, Ambassador of Afghanistan
Mr. Etemadi, First Secretary, Embassy of Afghanistan
SOA - Mr. Metcalf

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The Ambassador called on me today to describe his Government's position in the light of the recent Soviet demarche to Afghanistan protesting against the latter's UN-sponsored oil drilling plans.

He began by going at some length into the history of Afghan-Pakistan relations and the central issue of Pushtoonistan. The Ambassador said that the British gave assurances to Afghanistan that its interest in the future of the Pathans in the Northwest Frontier Province of British India would be taken into account at the time of the partition of India. In a referendum to determine the wishes of the Pathans only two choices were open to them: accession to India or to Pakistan. Afghanistan's contention is that a third option should have been offered, namely, that of a free Pathan nation. The Ambassador said that ever since partition Afghanistan's efforts to induce Pakistan to discuss the status of the Pathans have met with failure. In the meantime (he continued) Pakistan has been imposing an "economic blockade" against Afghanistan which has resulted in steady economic deterioration.

The Ambassador explained that one of the principal outside needs of Afghanistan is gasoline, and that in the light of Pakistan's "economic blockade" two sources were open to it. It could either explore for oil within its own boundary, or it could look to the Soviet Union as a supplier. Some drilling activity was begun shortly before World War II, but it was terminated when hostilities broke out. Finally, after the war Afghanistan concluded a barter arrangement with the Soviet Union in order to obtain a supply of petroleum products from that country

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for the northern area of Afghanistan. Subsequently it decided to resume oil exploration activities, using French technicians under UN auspices. It was this decision that provoked the recent Soviet demarche.

The Ambassador said that on behalf of his government he wanted to make it clear that he did not intend to play on the theme of the Soviet menace in his talks with the Department. However, the fact remains (he went on to say) that the Soviets know that Afghanistan's sources of supplies from the south are "blocked" and that it must rely upon the Soviets for essential items. This is the position that Afghanistan finds itself in today, the Ambassador said, adding that his government has instructed him to explain the position to the State Department and to ask for its "opinion."

I said that it seemed to me that the most desirable move now is to send an ambassador to Pakistan as a necessary step in the resumption of the negotiation of outstanding problems. I observed that there are other means of solving issues, such as mediation and arbitration, but that settlement by diplomatic negotiation should be attempted first. In this effort the US would be glad to lend its support. The Ambassador replied that envoys had been exchanged by the two governments after Pakistan became sovereign in 1947, but after it became evident that Pakistan would not agree to talk about Pushtoonistan, Afghanistan withdrew its ambassador. Subsequently the United States made an informal attempt by its demarche of 1950 to get the two countries to agree to discuss their mutual problems; the Ambassador said that this effort failed because of Pakistan's rejection of the offer.

I asked Mr. Metcalf if he had any observations to make at this point. He remarked that it was his understanding that the Pakistanis are willing now to talk to the Afghans about all their common problems. The Ambassador said that the phrase "all common problems" is too vague. I said that the Afghans might well send an ambassador to Karachi to see just how vague it is.

I then suggested that for themoment we put aside the problem of Afghan-Pakistan relations and turn to the Soviet demarche. I said that it was well known that the Afghans are a proud people and resent interference into their domestic affairs by anyone. Their rejection of the demarche reflected this spirit and, in the Department's opinion, it was the wise and proper course to follow. I then asked the Ambassador what, in his opinion, the Soviets would do if Afghanistan went ahead with its oil drilling activities in northern Afghanistan or, alternatively, what would they do if the Afghans proceeded with other types of developmental activity in that area under UN auspices. The Ambassador parried with the assertion that essentially it was not a question of what the Soviets might or might not do under given circumstances, but it is a question of what the Soviets know they can do since the Afghans are "sealed off" in the south and must depend upon the Soviets for essential supplies.

I said that it seems to me that the Ambassador's exposition poses a primarily political problem rather than an economic one, and that accordingly a solution

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would seem to lie in the improvement of relations between Afghanistan and Pakistan. The Ambassador intimated that Afghanistan would welcome any effort by the United States to persuade Pakistan to accept an Afghan ambassador with the understanding that Pushtoonistan would be a subject of discussion.

The conversation was concluded with my assurance that we would consider carefully the Ambassador's exposition, after which we would talk further with him on the subject.

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The President looked [redacted] well, was confident [redacted] Stevenson would be elected, and was looking forward with pleasure to the whistle-stop trip [redacted] he will start on early Monday morning.

We had a long meeting at the office on Morocco and Tunisia. Messrs. Matthews, Perkins, Bohlen, Sandifer, Jernegan, Phillips, Knight, McBride, Utter, Wainhouse, and Helen Kirkpatrick were present. We got together a draft for possible use by the Secretary as a personal communication from him to M. Schuman.

Carrie and Macgill James came to dinner with us tonight, and afterwards E. went on by herself to the United Nations Day Ball at the Hotel Statler.

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